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ABSTRACT

This study examined the quality of relations characterizing adolescents' social environments and related variations in the quality of relations to associates' social roles and to the gender and culture of both associates and subjects. It investigated whether adolescents from Japan and from the United States described their relationships with significant others using similar dimensions (functional roles) and whether significant others filling similar social roles (mother, father, unrelated adult, and unrelated peer) were described as filling similar functional roles. College juniors (N=126) from the United States and college freshmen (N=239) from Japan listed the 10 most important people in their lives prior to the time they entered college, rated these associates on 27 (U.S.) or 29 (Japan) functions, described activities that they participated in with each associate, and provided background information about themselves and their families. The results revealed that parents and friends were the most important sources of support and companionship to adolescents in both countries and were also the most prominent antagonists. Despite strong cultural differences, a strikingly similar set of functional roles emerged from factor analysis of the relationship descriptors in both countries: Companion, Mentor, Antagonist, and Subordinate. Functional roles and social roles appeared to be related, but not identical constructs. Japanese and American youths described associates in the same social role using different functional roles. (NB)

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FUNCTIONAL ROLES AND SOCIAL ROLES:

ADOLESCENTS' SIGNIFICANT OTHERS IN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN

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Adolescents' social environments differ demonstrably from one another. Some adolescents, for example, associate primarily with a small group of peers, while others have larger or multiple groups of peers, and still others spend considerable time in the company of adults. Social environments also vary in the characteristic qualities of relations among the people in them. For example, some adolescents share a great deal of emotional support and companionship with their associates, while others interact aggressively or competitively. This study explores the quality of relations characterizing adolescents' social environments and relates variations in the quality of relations to associates' social roles and to the gender and culture of both associates and subjects.

Social Roles and Functional Roles

The term, "role," has great utility because it designates the connection between an individual and the surrounding social system. Perhaps it is because of this very utility that the term has been defined so many different ways. (Banton, 1965, and Levinson, 1959, have made constructive proposals in this regard.) In this report we shall distinguish two types of roles, and emphasize operational more than conceptual definitions.

Social roles are revealed by the answer to the question, "Who is that person?" when the answer is not a personal name; e.g., "my lawyer," "an electrical engineer," or "her sister." The social roles of interest here are defined in relation to the subjects of the study: parent, unrelated adult; and unrelated peer. Note that the parental role is the most completely specified. In most cases, only two people play that role. Unrelated adults and peers might include a wider range of people. They constitute important categories within an adolescent's social network. The categories are specific enough to suggest that the nature of the relationship between an adolescent and a person

in each will differ systematically. We would not expect an adolescent to relate identically to his father and to a friend. Knowing the gender of both the subject and the associate adds important information about the probable nature of their relations. Sons tend to relate to their fathers differently than to their mothers.

Part of the quality of a relationship can be captured by identifying the "functional role" of an associate. A person's functional role tells what that person does with and for the subject. Functional roles are defined operationally by responses to a series of questionnaire items describing the nature of a relationship. Those used here are labelled Companion, Supporter, Mentor, and Antagonist, which reflect groupings of items identified by factor analysis. (See Methods section.)

As adolescents grow older, their social networks become larger and more diverse. In addition to parents, siblings, and other family members who are important from childhood, adolescents expand their social networks to include peers of both genders and unrelated adults. The process is one of network expansion, not substitution. Abundant evidence indicates that parents remain the most important people in adolescents' lives even as the number and range of important people increase (e.g., Blyth, Hill, & Thiel, 1982; Garbarino, Burston, Raber, Russell, & Crouter, 1978; Galbo, 1986).

Note that the perspective adopted in this study is that of the adolescent subject. Relying on the adolescents' perception of the relationship is adequate and appropriate so long as the reader understands that when an associate is described as a Mentor, that means that the subject saw the associate as performing that role. Whether the associate shares this identification or intends to perform the role is irrelevant for present purposes.

One might expect particular social roles to be associated with particular functional roles for at least two reasons. First, the expectations and demands implied by a given social role might cause persons filling the social role to organize their behaviors around similar goals. For example, most women filling the social role of Mother want their children to learn to behave in a socially acceptable manner. Because of this common goal, women in the social role of Mother tend to act in ways that they believe will accomplish this goal - instructing their children in proper behavior and punishing them when they fail to meet the standards set. To the extent that children perceive their mothers' behavior as motivated by the desire to instruct, the social role of Mother will be associated with the functional role of Mentor.

Second, one might expect particular social roles to be associated with particular functional roles because subjects' attitudes towards persons in particular social roles could cause subjects to interpret associates' behaviors in accordance with the social role, whether or not the associate in that social role is actually acting in accordance with those attitudes.

The distinction between social roles and functional roles suggests the following questions for exploration:

> Question 1: Do adolescents perceive associates in different social roles as differing in the extent to which they perform functional roles?
>
> Question 2: Does the association between social and functional roles vary depending upon the culture in which the adolescent lives (i.e. Japan v. the United States) or with the adolescent's gender?

Selected theoretical and empirical literature in the domain of

adolescents' social relations (Blyth, Hill, & Thiel, 1982; Blyth & Foster-Clark, 1987; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983; Cochran & Brassard, 1979; Cooper & Ayers-Lopez, 1985; Galbo, 1986; Hartup, 1979, Hunter, 1984; Smetana, 1988; Youniss, 1983) suggest the following hypothesized associations between social and functional roles:

Hypothesis 1: Because of their greater experience and greater responsibility for socialization, adults will be Mentors to a greater extent than peers. Parents will be Mentors to a greater extent than Unrelated Adults. Same-gender associates will be Mentors more than cross-gender associates

Hypothesis 2: Because of the expected emotional saliency of parents to their children, relations with parents will be characterized by positive affect; i.e., they will be described in terms of the functional roles of Companion and Supporter. However, in view of the prevalence of adolescent-parent conflict and of adolescents' inability to remove themselves completely from the family in the face of conflict, parents will also be described as performing the Antagonist role.

Hypothesis 3: Because relations with unrelated associates, especially peers, will only be maintained if they are emotionally satisfying, Unrelated Adults and Peers will perform the functional roles of Companion and Supporter to a high degree. For the same reason, they will perform functions characterized by negative affect

(i.e., Antagonist) less than parents.

Hypothesis 4: Same-gender associates will be more likely to be described as Companions and Supporters than cross-gender associates.

Predictions resulting from these hypotheses are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Predictions of the Extent to which Associates in each Social Role will Perform Functional Roles

	Mentor	Companion	Supporter	Antagonist
Parent	high	high	high	high
Adult	med	high	high	low
Peer	low	high	high	low

These hypotheses relate social roles to functional roles and bring in gender differences. In order to take advantage of the cultural comparison, we will also compare who male and female adolescents in Japan and the United States name as significant others in their lives. We ask the following question:

Question 3: Who are the people named by adolescents in the United States and Japan as most important in their lives?

Method

Sample and Procedure: Groups of subjects were asked to complete a series of questionnaires eliciting the following information. First, we asked subjects to name the ten most important people in their lives prior to the time they entered college. (We refer to these people as associates or significant others.) We then asked subjects to check yes or no next to a series of items indicating whether their relationship with each associate was

characterized by different functions (27 items in the U.S., 29 in Japan). Subjects then described the activities that they participated in with each associate and provided background information about themselves and their families. Subjects in the United States also completed a standardized academic aptitude test. Fifty-six male and 70 female college juniors from the United States and 119 male and 120 female college freshman from Japan successfully completed the questionnaires.

Measures:

Functional roles. Subjects' ratings of their associates on the 27 functions common to the US and Japanese questionnaires were analyzed separately for each country by subject gender. Because no important differences were found between the patterns of response by male and female subjects, their responses were combined and separate factors derived for Japanese and US samples using non-orthogonal Promax rotation. Although similar, the factor patterns for the two countries were not identical. (See Appendix 1.) The scales reported here were developed based upon the US factor solution. Items associated with each of the four functional roles are listed in Appendix 2.

Selection of Target Associates for Analysis. In order to identify the associates who performed the most diverse set of functions in their relationships with subjects, a total functional role score was calculated for each associate. The associate in each social role category whom the subject described as performing the most functions (i.e. who had the highest total functional role score), was selected as the target for analysis. If several associates in a category were described with an equal number of functions, one associate was chosen at random from among them.

It is important to keep in mind who the associates are when interpreting the results presented. Subjects were asked to name people in their lives who were most important to them. Any conclusions drawn about differences in adolescents' relations with associates in different social roles cannot be interpreted as, for example, the difference in how relations with prototypic mothers differ from relations with prototypic peers, but rather as the difference in relations with adolescents' mothers and their most important (presumably closest) peers.

For purposes of analysis, we further limit the generalizability of the conclusions we may draw by selecting from named associates the single associate in each social role whom the adolescent described as performing the most functions. For parents this does not pose a problem of interpretation, but for peers it limits the generalizability of any conclusions about adolescents' relationships with peers to adolescents' relations with their single most important peer.

The rationale for imposing such a limit is that it allows us to compare the most important person in each social role, thus increasing the comparability among associates in each category. Comparability is an important issue given the differences in the people in each social role from whom an adolescent chooses his or her associates. The dilemma is summed up in the old adage that you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your relatives. For a given adolescent, the number of parents from whom they may choose is strictly limited. Siblings are limited as well - a person who has several of them may choose which one is most important, but has no choice about the population from which choices are drawn. Unrelated associates may be chosen from a much larger population, though the number of unrelated adults

who are available to adolescents as potential associates is much smaller than the number of available peers.

This caveat applies to the generalizability of findings concerning differences between the functional roles performed by different associates. By choosing what appear to be the most important target associates for analysis, we limit the variability in the functions they perform (They are all, in at least some sense, "high quality" associates.), but increase the validity of the comparison across social roles. To put it in colloquial terms, if you choose the most important people in your life, you limit the differences among them (they are all important to you), but comparing the differences between your relations with your mother and your best friend gives a much better feel for the differences in the potential of relations with people in different social roles than would comparing your relations with your mother to your relations with a casual acquaintance.

Results

Our first two questions can be addressed simultaneously, taking one functional role at a time.

> Question 1: Do adolescents perceive associates in different social roles as differing in the extent to which they perform functional roles?
>
> Question 2: Does the association between social and functional roles vary depending upon the culture in which the adolescent lives (i.e. Japan v. the United States) or with the adolescents' gender?

Mentor: Mean scores on the Mentor scale for the highest scoring associates in each social role are presented in Figure 1. The hypothesis was

generally supported. As hypothesized, adults were described as filling more of the functions of a Mentor than peers, parents more than unrelated adults, and same-gender associates more than cross-gender associates. One exception to this general trend is that Japanese males describe their parents, unrelated male adult associates, and male peers as performing equivalent numbers of Mentoring functions. Adolescents in the United States differentiate more than those from Japan among the social roles of associates to whom they ascribe the role of Mentor. This differentiation is manifested with regard to adults in the United States, who are described as filling more Mentoring functions than adults in Japan.

Companion: Mean scores on the Companion scale are presented in Figure 2. Relations with peers (with whom adolescents are voluntarily associated) were characterized by the highest levels of companionship, a finding that was not hypothesized. There is no clear difference in the amount of companionship provided by parents and unrelated adults.

Differences between cultures are more striking in this functional role than differences between males and females within each culture. Adolescents in the United States are more likely to describe their associates as Companions than adolescents in Japan. There is a larger differentiation in the descriptions of same and cross-gender peers in Japan than there is in the United States.

Supporter: Mean scores on the Supporter scale are presented in Figure 3. Our hypothesis of high support from all associates was not supported. Gender of associate was more important than anticipated. Parents, especially mothers, were described as providing more support functions than unrelated adults. Female associates provided a greater variety of supportive functions

than did male associates.

American adolescents differentiate more between the supportive functions they ascribe to different social roles than do Japanese adolescents. Specifically, they describe parents and peers as supportive to a greater extent than they describe unrelated adults as supportive or than Japanese adolescents describe parents or peers as supportive.

Antagonist: Although no associate was characterized by a high degree of antagonism, American adolescents ascribed more antagonistic functions to their associates than did Japanese adolescents (Figure 4). Contrary to our hypothesis, peers and parents were equally likely to perform the functional role of Antagonist. Again, American youths differentiated more in the functions they ascribed to associates in different social roles than did Japanese youths.

> Question 3: Who are the people that adolescents in the United States and Japan name as most important in their lives?

To put these differences in associations between functional roles and social roles in proper perspective, we need to know about the relative importance of the people filling different social roles in adolescents' social networks. One way to look at the composition of adolescents' social networks is to ask what percentage of adolescents named at least one associate in each social role. This information is presented in Figure 5.

Three patterns emerge. Japanese males are less likely to name parents as one of the ten most important people in their lives than are Japanese females or American adolescents of either gender. Fewer than 75 percent of Japanese males named their father as an important associate and fewer than 70 percent

named their mother as important. In contrast, Japanese adolescents are more likely than American adolescents to name at least one peer on their list of significant associates. In both countries, unrelated females are less likely to be named as important by males than unrelated males are by females. In summary, in comparison to American adolescents, Japanese adolescents are less likely to rank their parents as most important and more likely to rank their peers as most important. Males in both countries are unlikely to describe unrelated females as important.

Conclusion

Parents and friends are the most important sources of support and companionship to adolescents in both the United States and Japan. Simultaneously, they are the most prominent Antagonists. Peers are more important than parents in the functional role of Companion. The only functional role in which parents and other adults are more important than peers is, appropriately, Mentor.

Subjects in the Japanese sample uniformly reported lower mean functional role scores for their associates than did U.S. subjects. As a result, cultural differences were greater than gender differences except for the Supporter role.

The most consistent gender difference was the strong tendency for subjects of both cultures to describe same-gender associates as performing the functional roles to a higher degree than other-gender associates. Thus, mothers tended to receive higher mean functional role scores for girls and fathers for boys and the pattern held for unrelated adults and peers, with the exception that female peers were more often seen as Supporters by males in both cultures than were male peers and that U.S. males were more likely to

name female peers as Mentors than male peers.

These results support the conclusion of previous work that different social roles are associated with particular functional roles. Our findings suggest that the pattern of this association varies depending upon the gender of the adolescent and the cultural context in which the relationship occurs. This difference in the patterning of associations between functional roles and social roles across gender and culture further validates the conceptual distinction between functional and social roles.

The finding that cultural differences are larger than gender differences supports the view that people holding identical social roles function differently in response to a shared cultural expectancy. Being a father or a friend means something different in different cultures, despite the universality of the social role.

American youths differentiate the functions they ascribe to associates in different social roles to a greater extent than Japanese youths do. In particular, American adolescents ascribe more functions to parents and peers than do Japanese adolescents. The fact that Japanese adolescents differentiate the functions ascribed to associates in different social roles to a lesser extent than American adolescents do is interesting in light of the relative importance they place upon peers, especially in view of the relative orderliness of Japanese adolescents' behavior and the widespread attribution of U.S. adolescents' problem behavior to "peer pressure." Caution must be exercised in interpreting this finding, however, because the content communicated by those functions may differ. For example, one may be mentored in the performance of both prosocial and antisocial behavior.

A previously stated caveat merits reiteration. Although the functions

described here vary depending upon social roles, it is important to recognize that the associates described are particularly salient associates. They represent each adolescent's richest, most complex association with people in each social role. If a wider range of associates had been included in the analysis, especially peers, the results would have been different.

The final warning against overinterpreting these data flows from the pitfalls of cross-cultural research. The apparent cultural differences could reflect response bias. Rather than a real difference in the nature and meaning of relationships, it may result from culturally determined differences in the way the questions were interpreted and answered. The reduced gap between Japanese and U.S. respondents with respect to Supporter and Antagonist undermines that explanation somewhat, as does the fact that the questionnaire was translated and administered by Japanese researchers, who have also participated in the analysis and interpretation of results. (Backtranslation from Japanese into English generally supported the comparability of the items.)

Furthermore, differences in the choices of important people made by U.S. and Japanese subjects suggest real differences in social networks. Japanese subjects consistently listed peers first, listed larger numbers of peers than U.S. subjects, and attributed a wider range of functional roles to peers than U.S. subjects, who usually listed parents first and named fewer important peers than the Japanese subjects.

Cross-cultural research is sufficiently delicate that we cannot rule out the possibility that some of the above results have more to do with measurement than with reality. But the differences are intriguing enough to warrant further investigation with larger and more representative samples.

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UNITED STATES: Loadings of Functional Role Items on Five Factors

Functional Role	Mentor	Companion	Partner	Antagonist	Supporter
Mentor					
I learned how to do things by watching this person do them	.74	.07	.03	-.13	.10
I acquired knowledge, information, or skills from this person	.71	.03	-.01	-.10	.01
This person pushed me to do a good job	.62	-.21	.04	-.06	.03
This person pushed me to do things on my own	.58	-.16	.02	.04	.01
I got a lot of my values from this person	.57	-.12	.09	.28	-.02
This person served as a role model of achievement for me	.49	.04	-.12	.00	-.07
I admired this person's qualities as a human being	.47	.19	.09	.14	-.27
This person gave me constructive criticism	.42	.13	-.00	.06	-.03
Companion					
This person was fun to be with	.07	.72	.04	-.05	-.16
We shared a lot of interests in common	-.00	.69	.08	-.02	-.01
We did things that were new and exciting	-.03	.61	.02	.01	.06
We talked together and shared ideas	.00	.61	.07	.11	-.09
This person introduced me to new ideas, interests and experiences	.29	.34	-.18	.09	.02
Junior Partner					
I helped this person learn how to do things	.05	.12	.67	-.03	.09
When we did things together, I usually took the lead	-.13	.09	.64	-.10	-.06
I taught this person quite a bit	.06	-.00	.63	.12	.12
Supporter					
This person protected me from getting hurt emotionally	.10	-.05	-.02	.61	.01
I served as a source of emotional support for this person	-.13	.15	.31	.43	.13
This person gave me emotional support, security and encouragement	.24	.15	.01	.40	-.09
This person gave me advice about my personal life	.06	.33	-.06	.34	.10
Antagonist					
This person had some negative influence on me	-.10	-.15	.02	.04	.53
This person and I would get angry at each other	.18	-.02	.25	.04	.50
When we did things, this person usually took the lead	.29	.13	-.33	.08	.36
I competed with this person	-.19	.35	.14	-.14	.34

Figure 1: Mentor

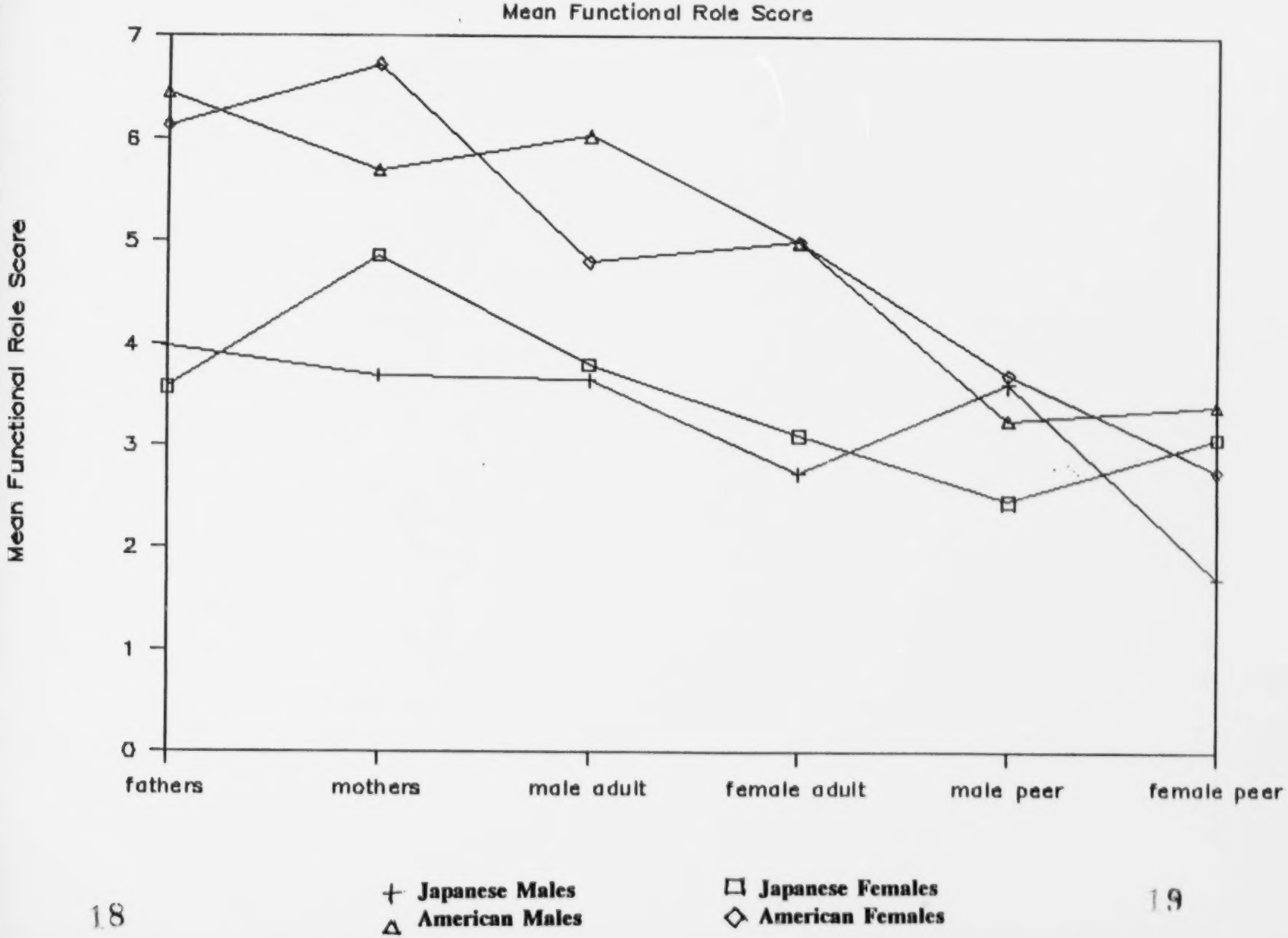

Figure 3: Supporter

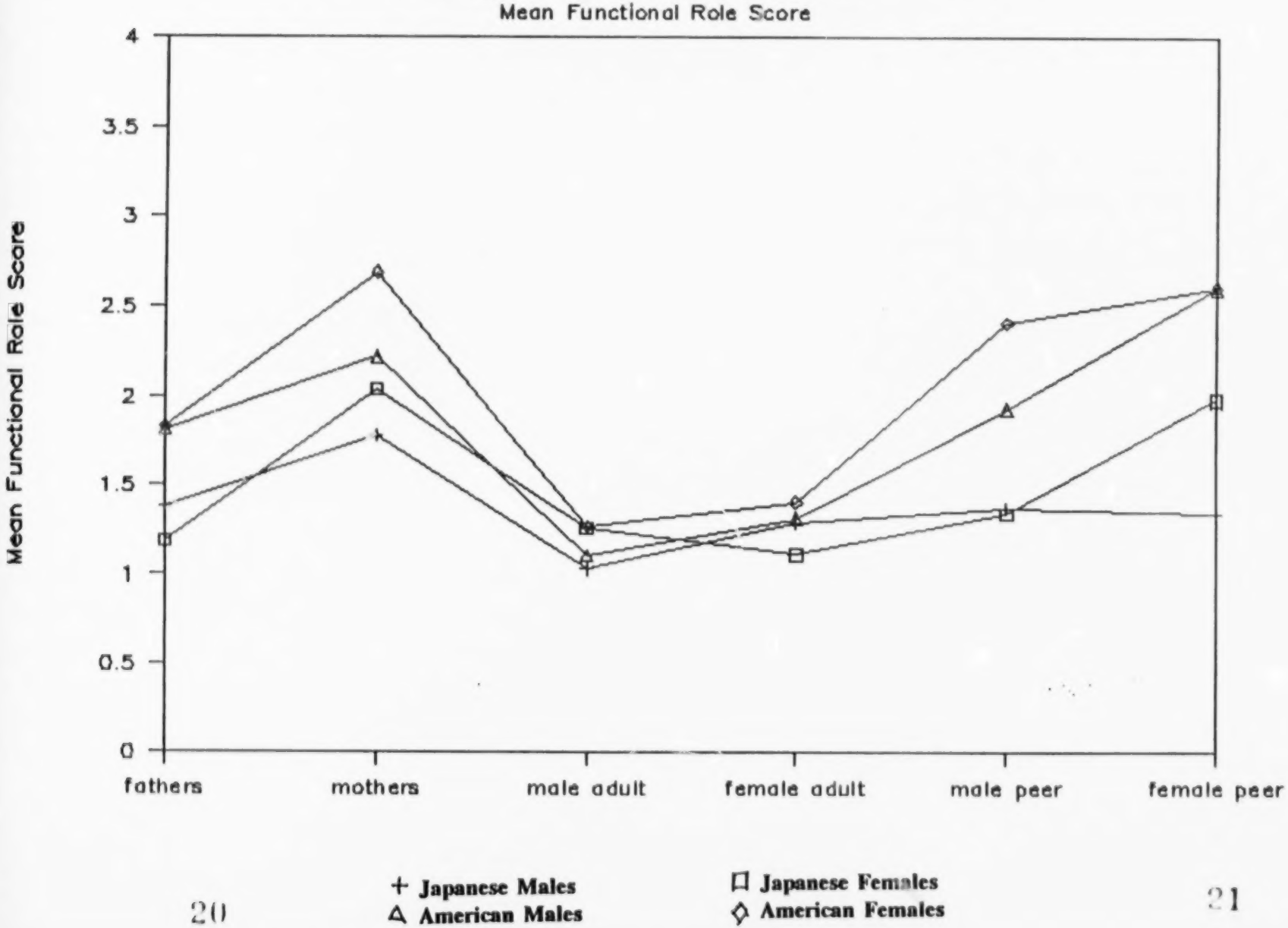

Figure 5: Social Roles of Associates